

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 19294

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, PINT, FR
SUBJECT: PRESS SPECULATION ON MITTERRAND VISIT TO US

REF: QUEBEC 239

SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH THE PS HAS REMAINED SILENT ON THE SUBJECT, AT LEAST OFFICIALLY, TWO LENGTHY ARTICLES ON PROPOSED MITTERRAND VISIT TO US HAVE APPEARED IN PARIS PRESS SINCE JUNE 23. BOTH CONCLUDE THAT MITTERRAND PROBABLY WILL NOT GO, AT LEAST IN THE NEAR FUTURE; BOTH REPORTS ATTRIBUTE HIS RELUCTANCE TO THE FACT THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HAS GIVEN NO GUARANTEE OF RECEIVING HIM AND FURTHER SPECULATE THAT CARTER IS IN FACT NOT NOW INCLINED TO MEET WITH MITTERRAND. THERE IS ALSO MENTION IN BOTH STORIES OF THE EFFECT OF AN ELYSEE DEMARCHE ON THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION. PS SOURCES CONFIRM THAT MITTERRAND IS NOT NOW WILLING TO DISCUSS THE DETAILS OF A VISIT, BUT DOES CONTINUE IN PRINCIPLE TO DESIRE A TRIP AT SOME UNSPECIFIED TIME IN THE FUTURE IF MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CAN BE ASSURED. SHORT SUMMARIES OF THE REPORTS AND RESPONSE TO REFTEL QUEBEC 239 FOLLOW. END SUMMARY.

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QM LE FIGARO (RAYMOND TOURNOUX): PLACING HIS STORY (JUNE 23) AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF CURRENT FRANCO-AMERICAN RELATIONS AS THEY ARE COLORED BY RECENT CONGRESSIONAL VISITS TO FRANCE, FORMER SECRETARY KISSINGER'S COMMENTS ON THE FRENCH SITUATION AND GOF DEMARCHES TO WASHINGTON, TOURNOUX SAW MITTERRAND'S VISIT AS BEING

AIMED AT REASSURING THE AMERICAN PUBLIC. AS EXPRESSED BY PS INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS SECRETARY ROBERT ONTILLON, THE OBJECT OF SUCH A VISIT WOULD BE TO REASSURE US LEADERS THAT IF THE LEFT WON IN 1978, FRANCE WOULD NOT LEAVE THE ATLANTIC ALLIANCE. NOR, PONTILLON NOTED TO TOURNOUX, WOULD THE COMMUNISTS BE ALLOWED POSTS IN THE KEY AREAS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE MATTERS. DELVING INTO THE HISTORY OF THE PROPOSED MITTERRAND VISIT, TOURNOUX NOTED THAT PONTILLON HAD ORIGINALLY APPEARED TO EXPECT THAT PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD MEET MITTERRAND. A "CHANGE IN COURSE", AS TOURNOUX CALLED IT, MAKING SUCH A MEETING DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, WAS ATTRIBUTED TO GISCARD'S LONDON MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT. TOURNOUX PRESENTED THE CASE SIMPLY: PRESIDENT CARTER'S OPTIONS WERE EITHER TO SEE MITTERRAND, OFFEND GISCARD AND THEREBY SEEM TO BE HELPING THE LEFT ON TO ELECTORAL VICTORY OR TO CLOSE THE DOROR ON MITTERRAND AND THUS HELP GISCARD'S INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION. A REALIST, PRESIDENT CARTER WOULD BE INCLINED, TOURNOUX THOUGHT, TO SACRIFICE MITTERRAND'S UNCERTAIN POLITICAL FUTURE TO THE CERTAINTY OF GISCARD'S PRESENT. ARGUING FOR A PAUCITY OF ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS, TOURNOUX SAID THAT MITTERRAND'S REAL GOAL WAS TO BE CONSECRATED LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION AT THE INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT LEVEL.

2. TOURNOUX ON THE EUROCOMMUNISM ASPECTS OF THE TRIP:
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AS THE US POSITION TOWARDS COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS HAS HARDENED, TOURNOUX BELEIVES THAT THE CONTRAST WITH THE MARCH ROCARD/COT VISIT WILL BE ALL THE MORE APPARENT. AT THAT TIME, THE SOCIALISTS HAD BEEN GIVING THEIR FRIENDS THE IMPRESSION THAT SECRETARY VANCE'S VIEWS WERE THAT A LEFT VICTORY IN 1978 WOULD POSE NO PROBLEMS FOR THE USG. CLOSING OUT HIS PIECE, TOURNOUX, WITH ONLY MILD FRENCH MALICE, NOTES THE IRONY INVOLVED IN MITTERRAND'S AVID COURTSHIP OF THE US PRESIDENT WHILE REFUSING TO MEET WITH VGE -- THE MALICE COMES WHEN TOURNOUX THANKS FRANCE'S ALLIES FOR KEEPING A CLEAR COURSE IN ALL OF "THESE HIGH SUBTLETIES."

3. LE MATIN'S VIEW OF VISIT: IN LE MATIN OF JUNE 28 BERNARD VEILLET-LAVALLEE (WITH REPORTS FROM WASHINGTON BY BERNARD ULLMAN) STATES THAT MITTERRAND WILL PROBABLY NOT VISIT WASHINGTON, CONTRARY TO PLANS SET IN MOTION BY HIS AIDES LAST MONTH IN MEETINGS AT THE WHITE HOUSE. OFFICIAL SPOKESMEN HAVE BEEN QUIET ON THE SUBJECT ALTHOUGH, ACCORDING TO LE MATIN, THE POSTPONEMENT OF HIS VISIT IS LIKELY TO RESULT FROM PRESIDENT CARTER'S HESITATION BETWEEN SEEING MITTERRAND HIMSELF OR GIVING THAT

TASK TO ONE OF HIS ASSISTANTS. VEILLET-LAVALLEE THINKS THAT SOME OF CARTER'S AIDES FAVOR A MEETING WITH THE PROBABLE VICTOR OF THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS, WHILE OTHERS, HE FEELS, CONSIDER THAT SUCH A MEETING WOULD BE A BLOW FELT NOT ONLY BY GOF CIRCLES BUT IN OTHER EUROPEAN CAPITALS AS WELL - AND THIS AT A TIME WHEN THE US CONGRESS IS PUSHING FOR MORE SUPPORT OF THE PRESENT FRENCH GOVERNMENT. THE PS IS KEEPING QUIET ABOUT THE VISIT, STATING ONLY THAT PONTILLON'S LAST WASHINGTON VISIT WAS MERELY TO MAKE INITIAL CONTACT WITH THE NEW ADMINISTRATION.

4. UNITE REPORTER'S REQUEST FOR INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT:
CLAUDE ESTIER, SOCIALIST PARTY NATIONAL SECRETARY FOR
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PRESS AND INFORMATION, CONFIRMS THAT JEAN-PAUL LIEGEOIS IS A BONA FIDE REPORTER FOR UNITE BUT THAT HE IS NOT REPEAT NOT MANDATED BY THE PARTY TO SEEK INTERVIEW WITH PRESIDENT CARTER. IN DISCUSSING THE REQUEST, ESTIER, USUALLY CONSIDERED TO BE VERY CLOSE TO MITTERRAND, SAID "SINCE THE TRIP PRONABLY WON'T TAKE PLACE, I DON'T SEE WHY (THE USG) SHOULD FOLLOW UP ON LIEGEOIS' REQUEST." ESTIER FURTHER NOTED THAT THIS WASS NOT THE FIRST TIME THAT LIEGEOIS HAD OVER-STEPPED HIS INSTRUCTIONS, BUT PRAISED HIM AS AN AGGRESSIVE REPORTER WHO WOULD "BENE-FIT BY THE USUAL PRESS BRIEFINGS IN WASHINGTON, BOTH AT THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE AND AT THE PENTAGON." EMBOFF WHO SPOKE WITH ESTIER WAS LEFT WITH THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION THAT LIEGEOIS WILL PROBABLY BECOME UNITE'S MAN IN NORTH AMERICA.
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